Selling of GAIL's Shares

1649. SHRI NILOTPAL BASU:
SHRI DIPANKAR MUKHERJEE:
Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news item "Centre sells GAIL cheap to foreigners" which appeared in Asian Age dated the 10th November, 1999; and

(b) if so, the Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI E. PONNUSWAMY): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) In 1997, the Book Building process was followed to ascertain the share price of GAIL in GDR market. There were no quotes for the price of Rs. 115/- per share. However, price of Rs. 116/- per share was quoted by the bidders for demand of about 4.8 crore shares only. As GDR issue was launched with a mandate to sell upto 20 crore share at a minimum price of Rs. 125/- per share, the issue was withdrawn, inter alia, on account of extremely low demand even at the price below the minimum approved price.

As the price of shares often fluctuate, there can be no linkage between price quoted by the bidders, two years ago, in 1997 and the market driven price ascertained in 1999.

About 13.5 crore shares of face value of Rs. 10 per share of GAIL held by Government have now been sold in the GDR market, at a market driven price of Rs. 70 per share, which emerged from "Book Building" exercise.

Enron India GDR holding Limited and British Gas Asia Pacific Holdings PTE Ltd., have purchased GDRs. GDR holders are not entitled to a Board seat/management.

Acquisition of Seismic Data in Bengal Basin

1650. SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether one of the two seismic parties engaged by ONGC in West Bengal for acquisition of seismic data in Bengal basin, has been withdrawn;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether the above work programme was in consonance with recommendation of J. Kingston, the foreign consultant;

(d) whether as per the programme 3D seismic data acquisition had to be done in a 135 sq. km. area in oil prospective zones, if not, the actual area envisaged to be covered and actually covered; and

(e) ONGC's future oil exploration programme in the Ninth Plan in West Bengal?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL (GAS (SHRI E. PONNUSWAMY): (a) and (b) Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Ltd. (ONGC) has six different business centres. The Central Regional Business Centre (CRBC), looks after Exploration and Production operations of basins in the States of West Bengal, Tripura and Bihar. Three seismic parties in operation with CRBC are deployed to different areas as per technical requirement and ONGC's exploration strategy. As per the present deployment plans during 1999-2000, two of the three seismic parties in CRBC are to operate in Tripura area, leaving behind one for operation in West Bengal.

(c) and (d) Mr. J. Kingston, a foreign consultant, had made certain recommendations regarding future exploration in Bengal basin including acquisition of 3D seismic data and the areas suggested were as follows:

- Over a 72 sq.km. area to the South-West of Ichapur
- Over a 72 sq.Km. area to the South-West of Amtala
- Over a 72 sq.Km. offshore area subject to confirmation of presence of certain geological feature through other studies.

As a follow up ONGC has acquired about 118 sq.km. of 3D data in Inchapur area. However, no 3D data has been acquired in the other two recommended areas. ONGC in its own assessment does not feel that the indentified areas would need any further seismic input.

(e) During the 9th Plan period, 168 Ground Line Kilometres (GLK) of 2D and 768 GLK of 3D seismic data acquisition were envisaged in West Bengal. As on 1.10.99, 417 GLK of 2D and 2062 GLK of 3D seismic data have already been acquired. The interesting sand encountered in Ichapur-I was retested in a side tracked well.

ONGC's future oil exploration programme in West Bengal involves interpretation and integration of acquired 2D and 3D seismic and other geo-scientific data, for allowing up the leads and generation of commercially viable drilling prospects, if any.

CBM Exploration in Raniganj, West Bengal

1651. SHRI NILOTPAL BASU:
SHRI DIPANKAR MUKHERJEE:

Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to refer to answer to Unstarred Question 1982 given in the Rajya Sabha on 16th December, 1998 and state:

(a) whether Petroleum Exploration Licence (PEL) has been granted for CBM exploration in Raniganj area of West Bengal;

(b) if so, whether the CBM exploration has been commenced as stated in the aforesaid reply; and

(c) if not, the reason therefor and the details plan of activities for drilling alongwith time schedule in the area?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI E. PONNUSWAMY): (a) to (c) Yes, Sir. Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Ltd. has taken up Coal Bed Methane (CBM) exploration as a Research and Development (R&D) project. Preliminary geological field investigations and analysis have been undertaken. Further activities would be dependant on the results thereof.

Pricing of GAIL GDRs

1652. SHRI DIPANKAR MUKHERJEE:
SHRI NILOTPAL BASU:

Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state: